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So much can change in just a few weeks.

We have a new Federal Government and Prime Minister; the cold weather has finally settled across Melbourne; and WAM has a secure future.

In this newsletter we bring you a beautiful match story about resilience and persistence; a glimpse of Confined 13 and some reflections on WAM's history.

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## The future looks bright

In case you missed it, the WAM team are all aglow with the exciting news of our inclusion in the [state budget](#) to expand our mentoring program! This is a positive sign that evidence-based crime prevention initiatives that keep women out of the prison system and build their individual capacity are a favourable response in strengthening communities.

With this investment, we will be able to expand the program across all of metro Melbourne and improve access to be able to support more women. Our plans to explore bringing the program to regional areas are also underway. This means we will need **more volunteer mentors** to help create those crucial positive connections.

Take a read of Sarah's story about a recent match graduation to understand what it means to be a mentor – and if you or someone you know fits the bill, please attend our upcoming information session to find out more.

In more good news, one of our collaboration partners Taskforce has received funding from the Federal Government to expand their young women and girls "Living Free" program in the southeast. This means WAM will also be able to continue to deliver our **Young Women's mentoring program** to support vulnerable girls aged 12-24 who are in or at risk of entering the justice system.

We are also holding a Stakeholder information session to raise awareness of WAM's program and how to make a referral. We've reached out to services in the health justice sector and have received a positive response with many new services keen to attend. We are always seeking opportunities to work collaboratively to support women to have better

Want to get involved?

We are recruiting 40 mentors in the next few months and launching our Peer Mentor project. Read on to find out more.

outcomes and improve women's access to services. If you work at a service that supports vulnerable and criminalised women, please contact us to find out how to join the webinar.

We know that one of the most effective ways of improving community safety is through enabling criminalised women to gain the skills and confidence they need for participation in the workforce.

WAM helps build the right pathway, empowering women through the introduction of our **Lived Experience Peer Mentoring** project. This is an exciting initiative for WAM as we embark on bringing women who have graduated from their mentoring match together and are ready to give back. We have several women interested in undertaking Peer Work training, Mental Health First Aid, Certificate IV in workplace training and assessment, and some advocacy training.

One of the group members, Jaimie, has recently started work at McDonalds but she's very excited about the possibility being able to be employed as a Peer group facilitator. Jaimie is passionate about supporting other women with similar experiences and undertaking training in an area of interest for her where she can make a meaningful difference.

Just to get a foot in the door with relevant work experience will make such a difference to developing new skills, building self-confidence, as well as feeling valued in being paid for their time. You can find out how to support this project [here](#).

- Tricia Ciampa, Executive Officer  
[tricia@womenandmentoring.org.au](mailto:tricia@womenandmentoring.org.au)

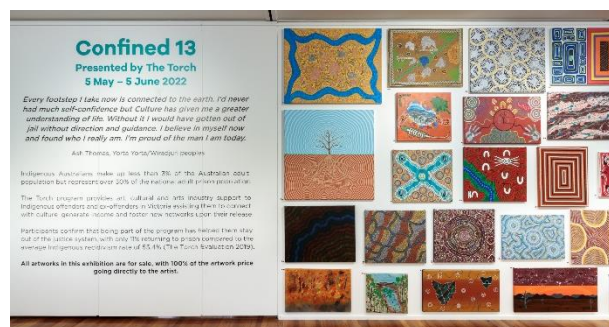


## The Torch: Confined 13 exhibition

National Reconciliation Week took place this year from the 27th May to 3rd June, where it felt even more special for a few mentors and myself to see the Confined 13 exhibition run by [The Torch](#). The exhibition runs every year and is made up of artworks created by Aboriginal people who are incarcerated during their incarceration or upon release. The Torch program empowers Aboriginal people who are incarcerated by connecting them to culture and building their self-esteem and resilience through art and creative expression.

As Aboriginal people are the most overrepresented incarcerated population in the world, even more so for Aboriginal women who are the fastest growing incarcerated population, it is integral that Aboriginal-led programs continue to flourish and empower Aboriginal people within the justice system.

It was humbling, inspiring and overwhelming to enter the exhibition space. To witness over 400 artworks created by over 350 incarcerated First Nations artists just in the state of Victoria over the span of one year is hard to imagine. Each artist had their own story to tell through their creation, often sharing experiences of culture, family, and land and it was powerful. It was uplifting to see the 'sold' red dots placed next to nearly every artwork, hopefully going to a home where the recipient would appreciate the gravity of what the artist had produced through the support of The Torch program.



I was lucky enough to have a chat with The Torch's Art Officer, Matty, who told me about how inspiring it was to see the artists develop their work through the program. Matty explained that a goal is that some participants of the program realise this can be a very real career direction, with some participants doing very well selling their artworks and gaining recognition through the exhibition. Through art, participants in the program are able to connect to their culture, share their experiences which reduces drivers of re-offending.

This year's theme for National Reconciliation Week is **'Be Brave, Make Change'**. Each of us play a part in promoting the self-determination and empowerment of Aboriginal people in our community and if art is your interest, why not buy from a First Nations artist where the funds all go directly to the artist? Why not get your next gift from [Koorie Circle](#) (I've got a pair of beautiful earrings from there), or [ClothingTheGaps](#) (very comfortable clothing), or pay it forward by donating to social justice movements like ['pay the rent'](#)? Acknowledge your privilege, be curious and understand where you can play a role in making change and most of all – be brave!

Confined 13 exhibition can be viewed online: [www.thetorch.org.au/exhibitions/confined-13](http://www.thetorch.org.au/exhibitions/confined-13)

- Phaedra Thain, Intake & Assessment Coordinator

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## Launching our PEER MENTORING Project

Our Peer Mentoring project will empower criminalised women to build their confidence, develop new skills and gain valuable work experience. Each fortnight women with lived experience of the justice system will come together online with a focus on sharing their stories, building their social connections, and improving future employment prospects through peer group facilitation and delivering workshops to each other.

Peer Mentors will undertake additional training to develop their capacity and be remunerated women for their valuable time as Peer Group Facilitators. Our goal is to raise \$25,000 to support this project for 12 months.

Please consider making a tax deductible [donation](#) and show your support for WAM's work.



## Leaps of faith

WAM began in 2009 with a great idea and some enthusiastic people behind it. Those people sourced our first amount of funding; a \$6,000 grant from the Collingwood Rotary Club. With that money, WAM commissioned its first piece of research by Donna King and Dr Susanne Davies, resulting in their report titled “Justice and Community Support for Women”.

The research found a clear gap in support services for women who encounter the criminal justice system. It showed that mentoring offered an innovative, cost effective and proactive means of supporting women exiting prison, and it recommended that a new mentoring program be introduced at the early intervention stage before a woman ends up in prison. And so WAM was born.

A pilot program was set up and women presenting at the Neighbourhood Justice Centre in Collingwood were matched with our first volunteer mentors. This pilot was funded for \$140,000 by various philanthropic organisations and individuals, including the Sidney Myer Fund, the Victorian Women’s Trust, the RE Ross Trust, the Helen McPherson Smith Trust and the Ian Potter Foundation. We thank those early funders for putting their faith in our new program.

The pilot ran successfully and was externally evaluated in 2012. The evaluation showed that the program was effective and that it should be continued and expanded. So, we then entered our next phase of expanding into more courts.

With a grant of \$60,000 from the Melbourne Women’s Fund we were able to start helping women presenting at Sunshine Magistrates’ Court. When they gave us that money in 2015, we hadn’t yet raised the funding that we needed to expand into the Western Suburbs. But, like our early funders, they took a leap of faith and supported us.

We did secure the extra funding we needed for that expansion. And from late 2015 onwards we began to secure multi-year funding over three years, which began to make WAM more financially secure. Then in 2018 we reached another milestone, with a grant of \$400,000 over three years from the Victorian Legal Services Board and further expansion into more

courts. An event run by The Funding Network raised over \$32,000 to fund our expansion to Frankston.

Over our history, we’ve also been supported by individual donors. Some give once or twice a year, others give monthly via our Give Now account, others donate gift cards or material aid items that we can give to the women in our program. No matter how much they give, these donors all believe in what WAM does and have collectively generously donated over \$122,000.

We have long believed that the government should be funding our program. And we’ve long advocated that early intervention programs like WAM are much better than spending money on keeping women in prison or building even more prisons. So, we were very gratified to receive support in 2021-22 from both the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DoJCS) and the Office for Women.

Which brings us now to our exciting funding news in the 2022-23 state budget. DoJCS have announced that they will fund us a total of \$3.6m over 4 years to continue and expand our program. As you can see from our funding history, this is truly transformational for WAM and is the result of much hard work since 2009 by many people involved with us.

On behalf of all of us at WAM, we thank DoJCS for this commitment. And we sincerely thank every other donor who has helped us along the way, especially those who took a leap of faith at times when our funding situation was still precarious. Thanks to the team and the Board, and our wonderful volunteers, for continuing to work so hard to get us to this point.

From one part-time employee and a presence at one Magistrates’ Court, we are now on track to expand our reach into at least ten courts, including a regional presence starting in the Central Goldfields region. And hopefully, before too much longer, to expand from a \$6,000 leap of faith to being able to help disadvantaged women at every Magistrates’ Court in Victoria.

- Mary Latham, Operations Manager







## Resilience and Persistence are a match

Angela and Christine were matched right at the start of Covid lockdowns in Melbourne. Therefore their 12-month mentoring match was a combination of remote support through phone calls, text messages and face to face meetings where possible.

Christine was 39 when she was referred to WAM, and was midway through completing a corrections order, with offending dating back to 1998. Christine had served three custodial sentences and presented with a trauma history that included family violence, mental health concerns and substance addiction. Her relationships with her children were a central focus; Christine wanted to be a better mum and grandma. Christine also wanted to find employment, improve her fitness and be more active.

At the time of matching, Christine had abstained from substance use for 6 months. She thought she should be feeling great with what she had achieved, however she felt this intense low feeling, a lack of motivation, feeling stuck in her own head without any direction of how to achieve some sense of happiness.

A few months into the match, Christine lapsed and needed support around her substance use. Angela supported Christine to identify her options and to work through the most appropriate course of action. Christine attended detox and rehab; however, unable to sustain the separation from her family and pet cat, Christine decided to leave and access in-home rehab instead that she successfully completed.

Throughout this period, Angela remained in contact, encouraging Christine and letting her know that she was there to support her with whatever choices she made. Angela didn't always receive a reply, but the important thing was that Christine knew Angela was always there to provide support, to have a conversation and to listen, whenever she needed.

Six months later, Christine began having significant struggles with her mental health. She reached out to Angela at a critical time, who made the difficult decision to contact a mental health team and get Christine the support she needed. This was a game changer! Christine reflects on Angela being brave enough to follow through with making the call that changed everything for the better. Christine now reports stability with her mental health.

Christine secured work in the 12 months she was matched, working in a bakery and as a café kitchen hand. Christine has rebuilt her relationship with her daughter and granddaughter. She has stayed free of drug use and feels a sense of achievement.



Christine said mentoring taught her that it was ok to ask for help and that she was deserving of support. She now feels as though she has the confidence to reach out when she needed support. Christine said Angela instilled confidence in her and she learnt that she could do anything that she wants to. Her whole life had changed in 12 months: she completed her Community Corrections Order, she had self-care and goals to work towards, and she had pride in herself. Christine got her licence back and is still working, with interest in returning to training in hairdressing and studying mental health.

Although this mentoring match had some challenges and the inability to meet up face to face due to lockdowns, what was fundamental to a successful mentoring relationship was the consistent approach and positive genuine regard that Angela had for Christine. Even when things were not going well, Angela remained supportive, present, available and understood things needed to happen at Christine's pace. Christine said the most valued thing Angela did for her as her mentor was to be firm, persistent, to follow up and remember things that were discussed.

When we first met Christine, she carried so much shame. When we met for the match closure 12 months later, Christine was more content and had found her self-confidence, gained employment, and improved family relationships. She worked hard to

stabilise her mental health and cease her substance use and continues to work on her health. She has goals and plans, now with the belief that she will fulfill them. Christine recognises when to seek out help and the importance to her wellbeing in doing so.

Angela said it was an honour to share a year of Christine's life and see her smash so many of her goals through a difficult year. Angela said Christine's resilience is amazing, and the fact she just keeps getting back up after each setback is awesome.

Christine asked for a mentor who is outgoing, someone to get her going and who is funny. Christine especially wanted a mentor with whom she could be herself. Angela met Christine's needs; she was

consistent, provided a listening ear and someone that Christine said she felt accountable to. In a year where there were many challenges for Christine, Angela was the constant.

Mentors don't need to have all the answers, they just need to care, have empathy no matter what is going on, be flexible and patient, follow up and offer hope and belief to another woman regardless of where she is on her journey of recovery, reunification, reintegration. This approach is what enabled Christine to rebuild her life, taking steps both forwards and backwards and to the side, but always on the way to a healthier and happier self.

-Sarah Nyssen, Frankston Coordinator

## VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

As WAM expands to provide support to women living across all of metro Melbourne, we are seeking more volunteer mentors to join the "WAMily".

Mentors are good listeners, non-judgemental, and come from diverse backgrounds. Mentors are women and non-binary folk who have availability during the week to meet up and provide support on a regular basis. Mentors believe in a community that is safe and welcoming for all women and non-binary folk.

Mentors are screened and trained for their role and receive ongoing support and professional development from our WAM Coordinators.

Our Next Volunteer Information Session will be:

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> July at 11am (via Zoom)**

Register your interest today by emailing: [volunteer@womenandmentoring.org.au](mailto:volunteer@womenandmentoring.org.au)

**TARGET AREAS: Living in or near Dandenong, Wyndham, Melton, Hume, Darebin & Maroondah.**



We especially welcome First Nations women and women from culturally diverse backgrounds.

## Reflections from placement

WAM was an extremely welcoming organisation for me to complete my placement. I felt as though I was a valued team member throughout my time and not just complete the tasks they did not want to do.

Throughout my studies I undertook subjects around policies in the justice system which gave me the background knowledge to complete WAM's annual policy review. Overall, many policies needed small adjustments, the policies that required major edits included the COVID policy, volunteer recruitment policies and the child safety policy. As new 'Child Safe Standards' are being introduced, WAM's child safety policy had to be updated to align with these. The volunteer recruitment policy also had a big adjustment as the organisation decided to include a provision for recruiting mentors with lived experience as this was highly sought after by the participants.

Additionally, throughout this process I had to identify what parts of the policies were outdated or were not being adhered to. As I had just learnt WAM's processes, identifying the policy aspects which were not being appropriately followed came easy. After they were identified I brought my notes up to the team to determine if they wanted to adjust the policy or the procedures they were doing. Then finally I would present the new policy for approval which ultimately got sent to the board.

I now have a thorough understanding of the policy making process and how policies have a direct effect on both the community and the way an organisation is run.

- Chloe, Placement Student